

ACKNOWLEDGING THE PINK ELEPHANT by aibhinn

Rose hadn't even done anything wrong this time round. It wasn't *fair*.

It was the year four billion and twelve. They'd landed on New Caledonia, a world populated by humans who'd long ago left Earth as pioneers, and the Doctor had told Rose to browse through the market while he picked up an obscure part he needed for the TARDIS. For one of the very few times since joining the Doctor, she'd done exactly as he'd asked—she'd window-shopped at several booths, bought some nice jewellery at a goldsmith's using some of the odd-shaped coins the Doctor had given her in a leather pouch, and generally keeping a low profile. Well, as low as a blonde in a sea of brunettes, dressed in bright colours while the locals mostly dressed in off-whites, greys, and browns, could keep. There were stares, of course, but there were always stares when they stopped in places like this. And she wasn't being offensive, after all.

And then a pair of armed guards had appeared out of nowhere, grabbing her by the arms and hustling her away without so much as a warning. She'd fought and screamed, of course, but none of it had done any good; the people around her looked aside, stepped out of the way of the guards, and pretended nothing was happening. The guards had nearly had to carry her in the end.

And now she was in a room with the guards behind her, facing a man in fancy robes and an odd, conical black felt hat. He looked her up and down, appraisingly, and she felt her ire rising again. "What'd I do?" she demanded of him as he walked slowly around her, almost as though he were evaluating the artistic value of a statue or a fountain. "I didn't do anything! I was just lookin' in the market, that's all!"

"Hold out your hands," the man said calmly, as though she hadn't said anything.

"What, you think I was stealin'? Only thing I took, I paid for." She thrust out her empty hands toward him defiantly, palms up. The long sleeves of her denim jacket rode up, baring her wrists. He looked at them, then nodded at the guards.

"No bands. She's a runaway. Get her changed, and take her to the slave

market."

Rose's jaw dropped. "Wha——no!" she protested. Big hands clamped on her upper arms, and she felt the first stirrings of panic. "No!" she screamed, twisting in their hands as they began dragging her backward toward the door. "No! I'm not a runaway anything! I'm here with the Doctor! No!"

The well-dressed man, whom Rose had begun calling 'the examiner' in her head, had turned round and was walking away. Now he paused, turned back round, and said, "Wait." The guards stopped, and he frowned, looking at her. "You have a protector?" he asked, a note of scepticism in his voice. "Then why has he not banded you?"

Banded? "I——dunno," said Rose, who had no idea what the correct answer might be, and didn't want to make things worse. "He's a tall bloke, quite short hair, blue jumper, black leather jacket. He was looking for a part for our ship. You can't miss him. He should be in the market."

The examiner looked at her for another moment, then said to the guards, "Search the market. See if you can find such a man. If you do, bring him to me."

They bowed and left, and Rose took a deep breath, pushing down her panic. The Doctor would be there soon, and he'd put everything right. Nothing to fear. The Doctor always put everything right.

The examiner looked her up and down with an expression of disapproval, then said, "I think we shall need to clothe you more appropriately." He clapped his hands once, and yet another guard came through the door. "Fetch a shift," the examiner told him.

The guard disappeared, then reappeared a moment or two later with a shapeless cotton dress. It was sleeveless, muddy brown in colour, and quite probably the ugliest garment Rose had ever seen. "You will put this on," the examiner told her.

"What, that?" Rose eyed it. "I'm really quite comfortable in my own clothes, thanks."

"If your protector comes, we will, of course, return your clothing to him." The examiner leaned forward, eyes narrowed, and she suddenly sensed the

utter hardness of him. "But it will no longer suit you if we have had to cut it off you because you disobeyed."

Rose glanced at the big knife the guard carried, and shivered. She took the dress, then glared at the guard and examiner with all the strength she could muster through the fear that threatened to make her hands tremble. "Turn your backs," she said, and she couldn't quite keep her voice from shaking slightly. Neither moved, and she repeated, a little louder (more desperately), "Turn your back! I'm not changing m'clothes with you two gawping."

The examiner raised an eyebrow, then turned his back, indicating the guard should do the same. They still stood between her and the doors, but at least they couldn't see her. Quickly, she pulled off her shirt, yanked the dress down over her head and wiggled until its hem fell to her ankles, then pulled her arms inside and unfastened her trousers. She stepped out of them, sticking her arms back through the arm-holes of the shift, and bent to pick them up, trying to fold them as neatly as she could when her hands still trembled. "All right," she said, and the two men turned back around.

The guard was as impassive as ever, but the examiner had a thoughtful expression on his face. "Perhaps you are respectable after all," he said. "No slave would quibble at being watched while she disrobed."

Rose was saved from having to reply when the doors crashed open and the Doctor strode in, his face set in anger. The guards who had been sent to fetch him were all but jogging to keep up. Rose tried to bolt for him, but the examiner grabbed her arm in a tight, almost painful hold.

"Let her go!" the Doctor snapped, starting forward, but the guards took hold of each of his arms, holding him back as well. They strained toward each other, Rose and her Doctor, and she could read the love and worry behind the anger in his eyes.

"You are this woman's protector?" the examiner asked.

"Yeah," the Doctor said. "She's under my protection. Let her go!"

"You realise, of course," the examiner said in a conversational tone of voice, folding his arms across his chest, "that this entire situation is your own fault. If you did not wish her claimed, why have you left her wrists

unbanded?"

"What d'you mean, unbanded?"

The examiner's face tightened. "Do not play games with me," he snapped. "I am not the sort of man you want to trifle with."

"I'm not!" the Doctor protested. "We're strangers here, just passing through. We don't know your customs. What bands are you talking about?"

The examiner gave him a hard look, but said, "All respectable women wear metal bands on their wrists, which bear the device of the man who is responsible for them. Banded women may not be interfered with in any way; they may walk as freely in the streets as if their protectors were with them at all times. Only slaves wear no bands, and they are identified by their shifts." He indicated the loose gown Rose was now wearing. "Any woman with no bands and no shift must be a runaway slave."

"Rose is no slave!" the Doctor snapped. "Our customs are different. She's a ———what did you call it——a respectable woman. And I'm her protector. Please, just let her go." He shot a look at Rose, in which she read an apology: *I left you alone without knowing what you were getting into. I'm sorry.* She nodded slightly with a reassuring half-smile; she had never blamed him.

"You truly did not know?" The examiner considered this, then shook his head in wonder. "In that case, I am sorry to have troubled you." He nodded at the guards, who released the Doctor and Rose. She rubbed at her upper arm in relief; she was certain she'd end up with a nasty bruise. "Simply punish your woman for running off without you," the examiner went on in an apologetic tone, "and you may depart unharmed."

Relief vanished abruptly. "What?" Rose yelped, swinging to stare at the examiner again.

"Punish?" the Doctor repeated at the same time, his face contorting in disgust. "Not bloody likely. She did nothing to be punished for; she did what I told her to. For once," he added with a sideways glance at Rose. "It's my fault I didn't know the customs, not hers."

The examiner shrugged. "Nevertheless, our laws are quite clear. Unbanded women must be punished before the court."

"Yeah? Where's the court, then?" the Doctor demanded belligerently.

He spread his hands to indicate the room they were in. "Here. I am chief justice of the city. In here, my judgment is all."

The Doctor's eyes narrowed. "And if I refuse?"

A chilly smile. "Then you may go where you will, but the girl will still be punished—by me—and then taken to the slave market and sold."

The coldness of the examiner's—no, the *Chief Justice's*—voice actually caused Rose to take a half-step backward. He knew she was a 'respectable woman,' whatever that meant in this place, but he didn't care. Women were chattel here, and it didn't matter to him whether she was the Doctor's chattel or someone else's, so long as she was properly marked. The realisation actually helped; it brushed the fear away and replaced it with something she much preferred: anger.

The Doctor's face was still, and she knew his mind was flashing quickly through all their options. "All right," he said. "I'll punish her. Let me go to her."

The Chief Justice nodded, and the Doctor walked over to Rose, stopping only an inch or two away and looking right down into her face. "Look guilty," he whispered, and took her by the shoulders, and his face took on an expression of stern rebuke. "Rose Tyler," he said in a louder, firm voice, "I am your protector, and you are never to wander off without me again. It was very wrong of you, and I'm really quite cross. When we get home, you'll go to your room with no supper. I expect a full apology."

A good thing she was meant to look guilty, for she had to look away from him halfway through or risk giggling. Sent to her room with no supper! "I'm very sorry, Doctor," she said to the floor in her best attempt at a contrite voice. "It won't happen again."

"Apology accepted," he said briskly, and turned to the Chief Justice. "There you are. She's an easy one, she is. A stern talking-to sets her right every

time." He took Rose's hand. "Shall we go, then?"

The Chief Justice's face contorted with fury. "Are you mocking me, sir?" he roared. The guards stepped menacingly closer, and the Doctor's hand tightened on her own.

"Certainly not!" the Doctor said indignantly. "I'm a mean ol' bastard at home. Trust me, she'll be punished. I'll see to it."

"Indeed you shall," the Chief Justice said coldly. He held out a hand, and one of the guards placed a coiled whip in it. "Right now. Or I will."

Rose felt all the blood drain out of her face at the sight of the whip, and she swayed slightly. They'd had to watch a man being whipped on another world a couple of weeks before, and the horror of that sight had never left her. The Doctor released her hand and caught her around the waist, supporting her. He looked down into her pleading eyes, and she saw his emotions clearly: regret, reluctance. A decision had been made—one that he didn't like. He turned back to the Chief Justice. "All right," he said gruffly. "I'll need a chair. And no whip," he added, as the man started to lift his hand to offer the whip to him.

The Chief Justice jerked his head at one of the guards, and the man exited the room, bringing back a heavy, ornate, armless chair, carved of some kind of dark wood and upholstered in a rich, crimson velvet. He set it down beside the Doctor, who sat and pulled Rose to stand by his right knee. He took her hand again and said very quietly, "I don't know if you'll ever forgive me for this, but I just can't see any other choice. I'm so sorry." Rose looked into his eyes, and gave his hand a small squeeze. "'S all right, Doctor. I trust you."

He hesitated, then gave the smallest of smiles and squeezed back. Next moment, he had pulled her forward so she was lying across his lap, and he had——

——*Oh, my God*——

——had pulled up the skirt of that ugly dress to bare her bottom. A cool hand slid beneath her knickers, pushing them down almost to her knees. Shocked and mortified, she struggled, but the Doctor placed his hand on the

small of her back and hissed, "Don't fight. Remember, you're feeling guilty."

"The hell I——" Rose began, but it ended on a gasp as the Doctor's hand smacked down onto her bottom. The shock, more than the sting, knocked her breathless, but then came another, and another, a steady rhythm of spanks that she couldn't ignore. The sting began to build, and she couldn't help it: she whimpered, clutching the Doctor's leg to keep herself still as he paddled her. *Better than a whipping*, she told herself firmly. *Just remember that.*

But a new ache was growing now, between her thighs. Somehow the spanking had mutated from embarrassing and painful to intimate and oddly pleasurable, and she had no idea how. She whimpered again, but there was definitely a different note in it: not protest, but need. She'd wanted his hands on her for so long, but this——

The Doctor stopped immediately, leaving her gasping and slick with want. He pulled her knickers back up over her bottom (which must surely be bright pink, if not red) and lifted her gently off his lap to stand beside him again. His hand was warm now, and it shook slightly as he clasped hers and rose to his feet. "There," he said to the Chief Justice. "Happy now?" His breath seemed to be coming rather shallowly. She shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other; her bottom stung, and she'd not want to sit down for awhile, but it wasn't the pain that made her the most uncomfortable; it was the deep pleasurable tingle, which she couldn't for the life of her explain.

"Indeed," the Chief Justice said comfortably, and incredibly, smiled. "That will do. You may take your woman's clothing and go. Enjoy your stay in our fair city."

"Not bloody likely," the Doctor muttered. He swept Rose's things up in one hand and, still clasping hers with the other, stalked out. She had to jog to keep up, but no way was she going to let go of his hand until they were safely back in the TARDIS.

He took them directly to the ship with no stops along the way. Not that she had any objection; she was quite willing to leave that appalling world behind. Once they were safely inside, he handed her clothes to her and said curtly, "I'm taking us into the Vortex, and then I'll install the part I bought.

Might be best if you stay out of the control room whilst I'm doing it; I'm going to have to take most of the console apart, and there'll be bits everywhere."

"Okay," Rose said self-consciously. Her cheeks still smarted, and her desire was still there, but the Doctor wouldn't even meet her eyes. Clearly, the events of this afternoon weren't to be mentioned. "I'll—just—be in my room."

He nodded; the sonic screwdriver was already out, and he was bent over the console, fiddling with something. Awkwardly, she stepped backward, away from him then turned and headed down the hallway to her bedroom. All right, then. If he was going to ignore it, so was she. She wouldn't go begging; she had some pride. And besides, if she read him wrong, he might get so uncomfortable he asked her to leave, and that would all but kill her.

Though the sexual tension between them was nearly killing her as it was.

The Doctor was very carefully *not* watching Rose as she left, but only through the application of every ounce of his formidable will. He took a deep breath once she was gone. It felt as though he could never get enough oxygen when she was around, respiratory bypass or no respiratory bypass.

And, God, that spanking. He'd done everything he could to avoid it, tried so desperately to get around it, but the bloody Chief Justice hadn't left him a bit of choice. It was that or watch Rose get whipped, and there was no way in hell he was going to do that. No way out; no way around it. So he'd taken the only path left to him—and the memory of it would be burned into his brain for the rest of his life, in every regeneration.

Her weight across his knees. Her hands clutching his left leg. Her beautiful bum, perfectly shaped and so soft. The sight of it growing pinker under his hand. The way the muscles shivered with each smack. The *sounds* she made, and the way she moved. It was almost as though she'd been arching into his strokes, instead of shrinking away—

No. No, no, no, no, NO. He pressed the heels of his hands against his eyes. No, he was not going to think about it. There was no way he was going to

take advantage of Rose that way. No matter how much he'd longed to stroke his fingers over the soft, reddened skin, trace the cleft down between her thighs, stroke her most sensitive flesh until she arched and mewled against him, saying his name in that breathy tone.....

"No," he said out loud, as firmly as he could, then glanced guiltily around, though he knew she hadn't heard him. Rassilon, now he was talking to himself.

There was no denying what he felt for her; there hadn't been for a very long time, at least in his own mind. He loved her——was in love with her. And because he loved her, he knew what he had to do: he had to leave her alone, let her fall in love with someone else, someone who could give her what she deserved. He really *should* just take her back to her mother, but he knew he'd never be able to; he needed her too badly, needed her with him. But some day she'd leave, and when she did, he wanted her heart to be whole so she'd be able to give it away to a man who deserved her.

As he most emphatically did not.

With a sigh, he turned back to the TARDIS's console. He had work to do. And if she stayed away while he did it, perhaps he could get some semblance of control back.

A week passed, and they visited other planets, and got into (and out of) other scrapes, and bantered pleasantly, but never mentioned the spanking——or, indeed, New Caledonia at all. The Doctor seemed to dance around it, going out of his way to avoid it if she did make any reference to that afternoon. It was as though there was an enormous pink elephant in the middle of the TARDIS, and he persisted in pretending it wasn't there.

It was driving Rose mad.

She knew what she'd felt; she knew what she'd wanted. And when she looked back at the events of that afternoon, she was pretty certain that the Doctor had felt and wanted the same thing. Of course, his avoidance could simply be put down to being embarrassed over having had to spank her in the first place, but why would he be? She knew him well enough to know that if it hadn't meant anything except a way to get them out, he'd have

made a scathing comment the first time she tried to bring it up, and brushed it off. The very fact that he was avoiding all mention of the planet seemed odd to Rose.

Maybe he *did* feel something.

Fretting about it was rapidly becoming an obsession, but she couldn't quite bring herself to do or say anything until one evening when they were both in the library after dinner. He was reading something written in Gallifreyan; she was scanning the shelves for information about ancient Egypt (a new fascination, since they'd gone back to watch the Great Pyramid being constructed). A book on the bottom shelf caught her eye, and she bent down to read the spine. She heard a small sound, and glanced over at the Doctor just in time to catch him staring at her bum. The expression on his face was what startled her: it was desire, naked and flaming in the deep steel blue of his eyes. He saw her looking and shifted his gaze quickly to the text in front of him, but not before the sudden realisation had hit her.

He really did want her.

She seized the moment before she could chicken out, and straightened up, walking over to him. "Doctor?" she asked.

"Hmm?" He appeared utterly engrossed in his book, but she wasn't fooled.

"I wanted to ask you something."

"Can it wait, Rose? I'm just in the middle of this." His ears were bright pink, and he sounded a little breathless despite his words.

"It'll only take a moment."

He sighed and closed the book over his finger, looking up at her. "What, then?" he asked, in a tone that might have fooled her if she wasn't entirely certain of what she'd seen.

"When we were on New Caledonia——"

"Nothing about that place is worth talking about," he said flatly, and opened his book again. His ears were redder now. Definitely something there.

"There's one thing." Boldly, she placed her hand over the book and gently pushed it down to his lap, resting her hip against the arm of the sofa where he sat. He looked up at her, with an expression that might have been startled or hunted. Taking her courage in both metaphorical hands, she blurted, "Tell me, were you as turned on by that spanking as I was?"

The startled expression became stunned; his eyes widened and his mouth dropped open just a bit. "I—er—" he stammered.

"Because I think you were," she said, searching his eyes for the answer. "And I think you've been avoiding everything to do with that planet because you feel guilty about how much you wanted me. But there's nothing to feel guilty about, Doctor. Nothing at all."

He stared at her in silence for a long moment, long enough for her to feel the first stirrings of uncomfortable embarrassment. Had she read him wrong? Had he really not felt anything? Had—

He set his book aside and reached up, cupping her cheek with his hand. She closed her eyes briefly, leaning into his touch, and when she opened them again, the stunned expression had been entirely replaced by a look filled with such love that it took her breath away.

"I shouldn't do this," he murmured, then slid his fingers into her hair and pulled her down to him for a kiss. It started gently, a soft pressure of lips, a sigh, a flick of the tongue against her closed mouth. She opened for him, felt the caress of his tongue against hers, and groaned at the joy of finally tasting him.

It was the groan that broke his control. He reached out, taking her by the waist and dragging her into his lap so she straddled him. The kiss became frenzied, a mock battle of desire as each of them fought to get closer to the other. She realised her top was undone only when his hands slid beneath it, pushing it off her shoulders and down her arms. She let it slide off, then reached behind her to flick the hooks of her bra undone. The Doctor dragged that down her arms as well, eyes riveted on her bare breasts. "Beautiful," he murmured, and leaned forward to take a nipple into his mouth.

She arched into him, whimpering at the pleasure that shot through her. Her

hands curled into fists, gripping the lapels of his jacket, pulling him closer. "Please," she whispered. "Please."

He let go her nipple, shrugged out of the jacket, and pulled the jumper over his head. His hands framed her face, and they gazed at each other. She felt as though he were pulling her into him through the intensity of those eyes. "Rose," he said quietly, "if we take this much farther, I won't be able to stop."

"Good," she whispered. "Because I don't want you to."

She didn't want him to stop. He'd been fighting his desire all these months, ignoring the aching of his body, telling himself that she couldn't possibly want a war-scarred alien filled with more survivor's guilt than most humans could tolerate without going mad. He'd nearly managed to convince himself that the deep connection they'd developed was merely friendship, and would always be so. Best mates, the two of them. The Doctor and Rose. Only that—and it was worth it.

But now he was being given permission to close the space between them, change their relationship from *the Doctor and Rose* to *theDoctorandRose*. To bridge the gaps and give himself over to his need for her.

His hands slid down to cup her bum, and she pressed backward into them, urging him on. He squeezed gently, eyes still boring into hers. "Seems to me," he said in a voice slightly deeper than usual, "that someone's been a bit naughty."

There was a moment's puzzlement in her eyes, then a flash of understanding and the smoky heat of desire. "Yeah," she said. The breathy quality of her voice sent shivers through him. "I have."

"Then I think you should be punished."

"Definitely." Her mouth was open, her eyes wide, her teeth worrying at her lip. He could sense the tension in her. This wasn't something she'd ever done before, but she was willing to play along. To experiment with him.

And somehow, the trust that took was the hottest part of all of it.

He captured her mouth with his for a deep, hot kiss, but broke it just as she started to melt into him. "Stand up," he said, and moved his hands to her hips to help her climb off the sofa and back to a standing position. He shifted his seat to the centre of the sofa and tugged her back over to stand in front of him again, then released her and leaned back against the sofa cushions. "Take off your clothes," he said softly.

Eyes never leaving him, she reached down to pull off her trainers and socks, then unfastened her jeans. They slithered down her legs, and she pushed them over her feet with her hands, then tossed them off to the side. Her knickers were bright pink and miniscule, barely clinging just below her hipbone. He gritted his teeth as she slid her fingers under the waistband and slowly slid them down as well, letting them land on top of her jeans. She wasn't a natural blonde, he noticed with the small corner of his brain that was still thinking coherently; the rest of his brain was taken up with admiring the long expanses of creamy pale skin, flushed with anticipation. He had intended to have her remove his clothes as well, but he didn't think he could last if he felt her fingers on his skin now. He toed off his shoes, shoved his trousers down and off, and let the clothing fall where it would as he held out his hand to her. "Come here to me," he growled.

A little awkwardly, she knelt on the cushion to his right. He helped her drape herself over his lap, hissing quietly as her hip brushed his erection. She shifted slightly, let her knees fall open against the upholstery, then closed her eyes, rested her cheek against the cushion, and was still. Waiting. Trusting.
Fuck.

His big hand slid over her bottom, caressing as he'd wanted so badly to do the other day. He stroked in big circles, feeling the cool, satiny flesh against his palm. She made a small sound of pleasure, shifted her hips slightly, and he grinned. "Impatient, are you?" he asked.

Her eyes opened and she turned slightly to look at him with a gaze full of need. "Please," she said again.

His hand lifted and came down hard against her flesh with a sound *smack*.

She jumped, squeaked slightly. He raised his hand and let it fall again, and again, setting up a rhythm, very like the act of love. This time there was no pretense on her part; she definitely arched up into his strokes, welcoming them, mewling in pleasure. His hand grew warmer, began to sting with the strokes; her bottom grew steadily pinker; the sounds she made grew more demanding; her shifting body rubbed against his in a most distracting way.

He stopped, resting his hand over the bright pink spot he'd created. She was panting, her hands fisting in the cushion, her eyes screwed shut. He waited a moment to let her settle, catch her breath, and then let his fingers trail down over the curve of her beautiful bottom and slip between her legs. She let out a cry of pleasure as his fingers explored the slick, wet, swollen folds, dipping into her entrance, slipping back out again and moving to press against the taut bundle of nerves at her centre, rubbing in small, tight circles.

The effect was instantaneous: she pressed back against his fingers and buried her face in the sofa cushion, muffling her cries as she came, her whole body quivering with release. It was the most incredibly beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

Unwilling to wait longer, he lifted her up from his lap, helping her shift so she straddled him again, and then guided himself into her. Her head fell forward and they both moaned deep in their throats as she slid down his shaft to rest against his lap, but her eyes had opened, and she was looking at him through her eyelashes. He pulled her forward, kissed her, let his tongue take possession of her mouth as she kissed him back greedily. His hands slid to the small of her back, pulling her against him. It was as though she were all but boneless, her soft curves molding themselves against his hard planes. He could never have imagined this, that strong, independent Rose would let herself go so completely when she was with him.

He groaned and broke the kiss, pulling her head back just enough that he could look at her, bracketing her face with his hands again and letting the pads of his index and middle fingers rest against her temples. "Rose," he said breathlessly, "there's a—a Time Lord thing. Sex for us, it's..... not just physical. It's mental as well. We get inside each others' heads, feel what the other's feeling. I don't have to, to enjoy myself, but—I want to. I want that intimacy. But only if you want to."

He watched her as she thought that through. He hadn't forgotten her tirade at him on their first adventure, when she'd discovered the TARDIS had got into her head to translate and he'd not warned her first. She was protective of her thoughts, his Rose, and he couldn't blame her. But the thought of being able to share himself, all of himself, with her.....

He expected her to take a bit to make her decision, but to his surprise, she nodded after only the briefest moment. His brow furrowed. "Are you sure, Rose? You want me in your head?"

"Will I be in yours as well?"

"I don't know," he said honestly. "I've never made love with a human. But I think so, yeah. I can always stop, any time you want me to. I will. Just say the word."

She bit her lip again, and nodded. "Then yeah. Do it."

His hearts pounded with excitement. He leaned forward, kissing her gently, slowly, as his awareness reached through his fingertips and carefully slipped into her mind.

—joy nerves pleasure pleasure hope love joy—

Rose?

I'm here, Doctor.

—elationpleasurelove—

Move with me, Rose. I want to feel with you.

And then the physical joined the mental, and the Doctor lost himself entirely in her. He felt himself within her, and her wrapped around him; felt the pleasure of her slick walls and of his movement inside her; tasted herself on his tongue, and himself on her tongue. *TheDoctorandRose*. Together. Whole. Complete.

Someone was making sounds. Two someones were—but there weren't two someones here. Just *TheDoctorandRose*. He felt the intense need of

oncoming orgasm and didn't know which half of them it belonged to and it didn't matter anyway, they had converged and it was beyond all the words of the English language to describe. Not even Gallifreyan could truly describe this. There was nothing else in the universe but them. And when the pleasure of release burst through them, it was echoed almost immediately by a second explosion. They strained together, bodies entwined, minds connected, hearts racing in perfect unison. All and everything and beyond and more than ever before.

The pleasure faded slowly, draining away and leaving their physical bodies slumped together, Rose draped forward over the Doctor's chest, their foreheads touching, his hands still framing her face. Her eyes fluttered open, meeting his gaze for a timeless moment before she closed them again, tilted her head, and kissed him. He returned the kiss even as he slowly, reluctantly withdrew himself from her mind and let his hands fall to her waist. The kiss ended, and she leaned back, looking at him. A thumb stroked over his cheekbone. "My Doctor," she murmured. "You've been so alone for so long."

She didn't mean his nine hundred years, he knew. She meant the terrible silence in his mind since the destruction of his people. He'd never known how much he relied on the echoes of other Time Lords until they were gone and he'd been trapped all by himself in his skull. Tonight had been the first time since the war that he'd not been alone. "Not any more," he whispered. She smiled and leaned her forehead against his again. "No," she agreed. "Not while I'm here."

He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her closer. Somewhere, deep inside him, a wound began to heal, and he smiled.

"Doctor!"

He glanced away from the merchant he was haggling with and caught Rose's wave from the next booth. They never went far from each other on strange worlds anymore. She jerked her head in a 'come here' gesture, tongue mischievously between her teeth. He knew that look. He grinned and held up a finger to tell her 'just a moment,' finished his transaction (paying more than he really should have, but he was curious to see what

Rose had found), and sauntered over to her, standing behind her shoulder and resting a hand on her waist. "What is it?" he asked.

"This." She held up a flat wooden paddle for his inspection. He took it, feeling its weight and the way it rested in his hand, and gave her a Look. She grinned again, eyes bright.

"No finer paddles in the province," the merchant said. "Your wife will get your clothes cleaner than clean with this to beat the stains out. A bargain at only two silvers!"

The Doctor managed to keep the chuckle from bubbling up, but he couldn't completely restrain the amusement in his voice. "A laundry paddle, eh? Well, you have been shirking your wifely washing duties something terrible lately. Perhaps this will encourage you to do better in future."

"Oh, absolutely," she agreed, eyes sparkling merrily.

The Doctor dug into his money pouch for two silvers, causing the merchant's eyes to widen; it was really only worth about a silver and a half, and he'd almost certainly expected to be bargained down. The Doctor could probably have got it even cheaper than that if he'd tried. But somehow, he didn't want to take the time just now. The TARDIS wasn't far, and he wanted to try out their new purchase.

Hand in hand, they all but ran back to the ship.